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MEDIA RELEASE

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Canker Disease of Citrus Trees

Citrus canker is a serious disease of citrus trees that was recently confirmed in southern Santa Rosa County. Canker is caused by the bacterial pathogen *Xanthomonas citri* subsp. *citri*. Citrus canker has been a major pest of citrus in south and central Florida. It is economically damaging to the commercial industry and is also problematic to homeowners because it causes premature fruit drop, discolored fruit, and eventually causes the tree to become unproductive.

Canker was first introduced in 1912 into Florida and was declared eradicated in 1933. The disease was found again in the Tampa area on citrus in 1986. It was declared eradicated in 1994, but once again was found in 1995 in Miami. This time, the disease was not successfully eradicated in part because hurricanes made the disease too widespread to control. Despite its prevalence in south and central Florida, this disease has not been known in the panhandle until now. The University of Florida and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Plant Industry will be assessing the extent of the disease in Santa Rosa County in the coming months.

How might you know if your citrus is infected by canker? The best indicator of canker is presence of lesions, diseased spots, on both the upper and lower surfaces of the leaves or fruit. The lesions are raised and have a rough surface; they are usually surrounded by yellow halos. Similar lesions may be present on the stems as well. If you suspect that your citrus trees may have citrus canker, it is important to first contact the **Division of Plant Industry's Helpline Center at 1-888-397-1517** before taking any action. DPI and IFAS will be able to assist you with diagnosis and management of the disease so that the danger of accidental spread can be minimized.

The disease is highly contagious to citrus only and spreads rapidly through wind, rain and via people on their hands, clothes and tools. The microscopic bacteria enter the leaves, fruit and twigs through natural pores for gas exchange and through any type of wound, including those from pruning and insect feeding damage. One of the most common types of insect damage on citrus is the leafminer. Until now, horticulture Extension agents did not recommend using any control methods for leafminer as the damage was only considered to be cosmetic. The current recommendation is to apply a control for the leafminer when the tree has a flush of succulent new growth that is attractive to the adult leafminer. Controls for the homeowner include the use of horticultural oil and products containing spinosad as the active ingredient. Apply at the rate and intervals listed on the product label and target the flush of new leaves, making sure to coat the undersides of leaves where the adults generally lay their eggs. It is best to treat prior to visible damage to the new flush of growth.

The fruit can be protected from canker with copper sprays. Copper is the only registered product for the prevention of the disease. Please refer to the publication found here: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp116> for details on timing of sprays.

There is no mandatory removal of infected trees by the State of Florida. However, in areas such as the panhandle where the disease has not been known to exist, tree removal or aggressive pruning of infected limbs should be considered to slow the spread of the canker to other citrus trees. However, do not remove trees or other plant parts until a firm diagnosis is made and a plan is in place to remove the tree safely with a minimal risk of spreading the disease to surrounding citrus. Do not transport any plant material that shows symptoms of canker. Decontamination practices should be used when going from one citrus tree to the next. Hand washing with soap and water for 20 seconds or more to eliminate bacterium on the skin should be practiced as well as using alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Pruning tools or other tools that come into contact with citrus should be disinfected by a fresh solution of 1 ounce of household bleach to 1 gallon of water. An old or dirty bleach solution is not able to disinfect because the chemical is no longer active.

Grapefruit, Navel orange, early orange varieties, lemon and lime are most susceptible citrus to canker infection. Hamlins and tangelos are less susceptible. Valencia, some hybrids and Satsuma and other tangerines are the most resistant to the disease. However, all citrus is vulnerable to some extent. In order to reduce the likelihood of citrus canker choose the most resistant varieties of citrus, practice proper sanitation procedures, and purchase only certified citrus from registered nurseries within the state of Florida. It is unlawful to purchase citrus trees from another state and bring them into Florida unless the proper permitting is in place.

For more information on citrus canker visit <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp116> or call **UF/IFAS Extension – Santa Rosa County at 850-623-3868** between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Or you may email Mary Derrick at maryd@santarosa.fl.gov.

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